

The JC Supershow

Newbury Nomads: Jesus Christ Superstar, at The Corn Exchange, from Wednesday, October 6 to Saturday, October 9

It must be more than 25 years since I first saw **Jesus Christ Superstar** on the West End stage but, for me, Newbury Nomads' production of the Rice/Lloyd Webber rock opera was every bit as powerful as the original.

Directed with flare by Tony Randall and confidently produced by Sarah Scott, this was a show bursting with energy, from the opening scenes on Palm Sunday through to the stunningly moving portrayal of the Crucifixion.

One real bonus was the quality of the sound, so often a problem with musical performances. Despite the sizeable orchestra in the pit, none of the voices were lost, and even groans and sighs carried clearly to the back of the auditorium. Nic Cope's orchestra was in fine tune and brought vitality to the early-70s score, while a team of pit singers boosted the volume of the on-stage chorus with spine-tingling results in the big numbers.

Visually, the show was equally fine, with effective lighting from Richard Elliott complementing the solid dual-level set, and multiple entrances allowing the crowd scenes to flow effortlessly.

The tightly drilled supporting cast of apostles, disciples and rabble used the stage to good effect, while Jeanette Maskell's dancers provided some sparkling choreography.

There were some truly outstanding performances among the principals. The male lead roles in Superstar are vocally punishing, but Jason Hull as Judas took the part in his stride, with huge amounts of charisma and panache; despite one or two harsh notes, his confident performance dominated the stage.

Sandra Jones' beautifully melodic voice and tender delivery were perfect for the part of Mary Magdalene; while Daniel Maskell and Peter Kent gave strong performances as Simon and Peter respectively.

At the head of the eerily sinister Sanhedrin, Russell Barrett as Caiaphas and Tim Clarke as Annas were splendidly matched. Mike Cound, as the tap-dancing Herod, provided a superbly camp and tightly choreographed cameo; and Andy Spaak, with his rich baritone voice, brought suitable gravity to the part of Pilate.

But the most memorable performance of all was Stuart Honey's portrayal of Jesus Christ. He pumped every ounce of energy into a role that demands vocal acrobatics, huge stage presence and enormous passion, yet he also managed to convey the frailty and vulnerability of a man at the hands of a mob.

This performance was surely the pinnacle of a long career at Nomads.

Fantastic stuff!

MARK LILLYCROP